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Bad Reputations: A Discussion of Gender Norms and Personas Created and Performed in Courtly (and Not So Courtly) Lyrics

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BAD REPUTATIONS: A DISCUSSION OF GENDER NORMS
AND PERSONAS CREATED AND PERFORMED IN COURTLY
(AND NOT SO COURTLY) LYRICS

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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Entitled: Bad Reputations: A Discussion of Gender Norms and Personas Created and Performed
in Courtly (and not so Courtly) Lyrics

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Literature Review	4
Gender Roles and Personas in Troubadour Lyric	18
Analysis of <i>Trobairitz</i> Lyrics	21
Criticism of Female Artists	25
Gender Norms and Personas in the Present Day	28
Analysis of Joan Jett’s Persona	31
Analysis of Madonna’s Persona	33
Conclusions	39

Introduction

From 1000 CE to 1250 CE in Occitan, a literary tradition developed in the culture of the nobility and the courts. The courtly lyric tradition grew out of a unique cultural setting that allowed for the growth of a group of poets known as troubadours to write their courtly love lyrics in praise of the idealized lover. These were performed at the courts for the nobility as a source of entertainment and dealt with themes of angst, jealousy, and of course, love, among others. These troubadours produced a large number of works, in a wide range of genres, such as the basic *cansos*, but including genres such as *sirventes* and *tensos*. There is a small sub-section of these works, however, that were produced by women authors. These female troubadours have been collectively dubbed ‘the *trobairitz*,’ and have been typically treated by scholarship as both Other from their male counterparts as well as collectively analyzed as though they were one author, rather than examining how they interacted with and ultimately contributed to the larger body of troubadour work.

Through the course of this study, I hope to broaden the gaze of *trobairitz* scholarship through the exposure of the study of *trobairitz* as individuals, as opposed to a group, as well as demonstrating their connections and relevance to issues that are contemporary in nature. I also hope to show that the *trobairitz* were not simply imitating their male counterparts, the troubadours, but were fully participating within the paradigms of the time and of the tradition, in ways that support the gender personas created by the paradigms well as contend with them, and show the connections they have with other present-day musical female artists, such as Madonna and Jona Jett that work with similar paradigms. This interpretation of the *trobairitz* is one that is

currently lacking in the scholarship and needs to be addressed to help the *trobairitz* finally be heard.

In the body of scholarship dealing with the medieval tradition of the courtly lyric, female troubadours who produced works in the tradition were either marginalized as producing inferior lyrics or alternatively lauded for their spontaneous sincerity. While scholars have intensely debated the female troubadours, with topics ranging from questioning their literary ability by Alfred Jeanroy, advocating for their sincerity by Meg Bogin, and even to the discussion of lesbian overtones, there has been a lack of scholarship that has explored how exactly the female troubadours, or *trobairitz* as they have come to be called, existed and worked in relationship with the social paradigms of their time. Due to the roles of women that often rendered them silent, for the *trobairitz*, the simple action of a female writing would have been seen as unusual, much less writing courtly love lyrics that so closely align with those written by males.

One of the large gaps in scholarship, especially of feminist scholarship, is that much of the work that has been done over authors of this time period does not include a discussion of the *trobairitz*. Also, scholarship that has discussed the *trobairitz* focuses mostly on the differences of them from their male counterparts. It marginalizes the *trobairitz* by dismissing their work as inferior in composition and expression to that of the troubadours or tries to find an inherently 'female' quality about their writing that can explain the small canon of work that has been left behind. Few scholars approach the issue of why and in what manner these women were composing the lyrics, but when they do, they tend to view them as a single entity, rather than the diverse group that they are. The *trobairitz* did not all write their lyrics for the same motivations,

nor were they all operating in the same way within the same social paradigms. While much has been made of the differences between the *trobairitz* and the male troubadours, little has been discussed in terms of how these women were either breaking free from the paradigm of the courtly lyrics or were acting within it.

One of the central themes that I address is that of the role of gender within the social and literary paradigms created by the male troubadours. These paradigms are those of the lovesick and lowly male lover and the powerful but silent *domna*, an Old French word that while literally translates as woman, refers to a lady of high status that the troubadours were supplicating themselves to. The paradigms that the *trobairitz* are working in, both acting in a way that supports those paradigms, while functioning in the traditions, are in actuality using the same traditions to break free from their oppressive nature. I examine how different authors worked with these paradigms differently, rather than grouping them all together as a single entity. The *trobairitz* are more than a group of women authors who wrote in the same genre and should not be easily generalized, as they have been within much of the scholarship. The individual nature of each member of the group should be addressed as much as possible, because to lump them together loses the effectiveness of their voices.

The interesting distinction of purpose among the poetry of the *trobairitz* is one that is mirrored in the songs and personas of Madonna and Joan Jett in the 1980's. Both these women are reacting to a heavy-handed social paradigm of the time, although in different ways. The *trobairitz*, as well as Madonna and Jett, are seen as acting abnormally by participating in a male dominated tradition of both troubadour poetry and the rock bands of the 1980s that objectifies

and silences women, but the effect of the abnormal behavior is dependent upon whether the women were acting within the paradigm or beyond it. I will demonstrate how the *trobairitz* interacted with the social paradigm of the courtly love society through analyses of their works, other critical texts, and the lens of different literary theories, such as gender theory. In addition to this, I will show how this interaction with similar paradigms was repeated with the songs of Madonna and Joan Jett. The lyrics of these artists, while different in many ways, contain themes and motifs that have a strong connection to those of the *trobairitz*. I will examine how these female artists responded in both similar and different manners to these paradigms by either rejecting or embracing the personas created by their male counterparts and how that affects the perception of them.

Literature Review

Any work with the *trobairitz* should begin with Meg Bogin's book, *The Women Troubadours*, published in 1980. Bogin is one of the first to bring to light the importance of these texts and assign a sort of tentative canon. Previous scholarship about the *trobairitz* had been most famously done by Alfred Jeanroy, a prominent troubadour scholar who viewed the works of the *trobairitz* as vastly inferior to those of the male troubadours (Bogin 68). Bogin's central thesis of the piece was to argue for the sincerity of the *trobairitz*, in contrast to the courtly insincerity of the troubadours. She claims that this is what makes them important and elevates them from simple dabbling. She writes, "The voices of the women troubadours are as complicated as real people, and as earthbound. They sound like women any one of us could know. Unlike the men, who often wrote in the persona of the knight, the women wrote in no

one's character but their own" (Bogin 66). Also, even while Bogin seems to argue for the legitimacy of the female troubadours by means of sincerity, she seems to do so at the expense of their expertise. She writes "their poems are less literary and less sophisticated than the men's, but they have an immediacy and a charm that are particularly their own" (Bogin 69). This, however, seems to be a bit of a backhanded compliment. For Bogin, the issue of their sincerity is the means by which the female troubadours can prove themselves, rather than by the merits of their works alone. However, only valuing them for their sincerity exposes the *trobairitz* to the same denigration as that of Jeanroy's criticism of them.

Bogin even goes so far as to completely disregard any sort of literary reading of the texts, and instead only focuses on the parts that seem to best prove that the *trobairitz* really experienced what they wrote about. Bogin's attempt to legitimize the poetry of these women who previously have been disregarded by scholarship stems partly from her time period; as a second wave feminist, Bogin is trying to give a voice to women who have been ignored and marginalized due to their status as women. Her drawing attention to the value of these lyrics is important, but by generalizing them all in a group and by focusing solely on the assumed sincerity of them all, she casts them all in a light that reduces them to an isolated group outside of the troubadour tradition completely.

Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner presents an interesting perspective in her essay, "Fictions of the Female Voice: The Women Troubadours." She sees the conversation about sincerity as unimportant, and writes that "enthusiasts of this type in whatever century tend to insist on the contrast between the troubadours as professional poets whose poetry is a craft or trade and the

trobairitz who, as noblewomen, keep their amateur status and gain in emotional intensity what they lose in rhetorical skill” (Bruckner 866). Bruckner sees the validity of the *trobairitz* not in the absoluteness of their sincerity, but rather in the fact that these women wrote at all and in a manner that fully recognized the paradigms of the time. She offers discussions about context of the *trobairitz* and their canon, and argues against those who see them as fictional, and finally provides an analysis of Comtessa de Dia and Lady Castelloza.

Bruckner also makes a valuable point when she writes that “in some sense, to consider the *trobairitz* as a group already represents an interpretation of their poetry as a kind of feminist project, inasmuch as the poems and poets themselves, as well as most of the manuscripts that include their songs, do not segregate them or treat them as a group to be differentiated from the male troubadours” (Bruckner 870). This point is important because it identifies many of the problems in generalizing the works of the *trobairitz*: in order to determine their place in the troubadour tradition and how they interacted with their contemporaries, they need to be treated in a similar manner. Rather than lumping them all into a homogenous group, scholars need to see each author as an individual in order to find their collective place.

Brooke Heidenreich Findley provides a practical example of examining the issue of sincerity in a much different way than previous scholars in her article, “Reading Sincerity at the Intersection of Troubadour/*Trobairitz* Poetry.” Instead of viewing the sincerity, or lack of, as related to the legitimacy of the *trobairitz* and either rejecting or exalting them because of their classification in either category, Findley looks at how the question of sincerity exists in both *trobairitz* and troubadour poetry and how it is a topic of the poetry, rather than a test of its value.

She identifies, through the poems of Ysabella and Lombarda, how discussions of the importance of sincerity are more commonly found in female troubadour poetry, rather than in their male counterparts. Findley is quick to point out that the focus of sincerity in the works of the *trobairitz*, in her mind, is something very specific to the female troubadours and allows them to examine and interact with the paradigms created by the male troubadours. She argues that:

rather than claiming sincerity as a feminine trait, Ysabella and Lombarda make the sincerity question into a feminist issue. Interrogating their opponents' sincerity allows them to question troubadour discourse on ethical grounds, asking how troubadour practices of love and writing measure up in a dialogue between the sexes, and especially whether women have any more than a symbolic role in the game of love (298)

Findley sees this preoccupation with sincerity on the part of the female troubadours not simply as an effect of their femaleness, but rather as an important part of the discussion about courtly love.

As the flip side of the conversation, women, in bringing up the subject of sincerity as it relates to poetry, “use the sincerity question as a way of situating their voices at once within and in opposition to the troubadour tradition” (299). Findley, here, in disregarding the traditional debate over sincerity as it relates to *trobairitz* poetry, provides a valuable addition to the scholarship on the female courtly lyric. Instead of arguing for or against how sincere the poetry is, she sees it as part of the troubadour tradition as one of many *topos*, or topics and themes and analyzes how it contributes, challenges, and changes that tradition.

Bruckner also provides a general overview of the *trobairitz* in a section of the *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, which she traces to the rise and fall of feminism and its effects on the study of the *trobairitz*, as well as the difficulties in identifying both who the *trobairitz* are and what the *trobairitz* canon should contain. Bruckner also addresses the issue of sincerity, citing scholarship that attributes more spontaneous and sincere poetry over the same topics to the

trobairitz, simply because they are female. She claims this is due to the fact that “‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ are unavoidably cultural constructs, at least in part; our reception of certain poems—whether in terms of believability, acceptability, and so on—will be different depending on who we know (or believe to be the poet) and what kind of voice he or she chooses to invent” (Bruckner 222). Bruckner here takes the train of thought that Bogin began and expands and refines it. She places the cause of the supposed sincerity on the audience’s perception of the author’s gender. While this is better than simply giving the *trobairitz* certain characteristics solely based on their gender, it is still a troubling generalization that fails to take into account the nuances of how the authors work within their paradigms.

The most worrying aspect of the chapter is when Bruckner begins with what she terms a “literary analysis,” but seems to be mostly counting words as they occur in both troubadour and *trobairitz* poems. This provides interesting data, but there fails to be any real meaningful evaluation made with it. While helpful in some respects, this seems to be restrictive in the sense that it fails to truly analyze what are rich texts steeped in rich traditions. It reduces the corpus of *trobairitz* work to a numerical formula, without much thought to the literary characteristics inherent in the songs, and excludes any exploration of the individual motivation of the author.

Caroline Jewers, in the article, “Loading the Canon: For and Against Feminist Readings of the *Trobairitz*,” examines some of the history of scholarship with regard to the *trobairitz*, most notably the two extremes found in the arguments of Alfred Jeanroy and Meg Bogin. After examining these two positions, she makes the argument for a different sort of analysis of the poetry by the female troubadours. She posits that instead of isolating the *trobairitz* from their

male counterparts and from other female voices in medieval literature, they should be studied in terms of how they relate to and play on the traditions and styles of these different categories.

Jewers argues for a reading of the female troubadours more in line with how they were viewed at the time, or as close as scholars can get to it. She claims that “it is as individuals that they seem to have viewed themselves” (Jewers para. 5) and that scholars should stop treating them as a separate group from the troubadours and the traditions of their time. She says, “We need to know more about the conventions the *trobairitz* exploited, and should turn our critical attention to the presentation of women and woman’s voice with its use as a deliberate device to de-stabilize the male voice and the courtly ethos, just as the *Roman de Flamenca* does in a highly parodic way” (Jewers para. 27). She wants scholars to stop viewing the *trobairitz* in such an isolating manner, and instead view them as part of a tradition that examines and stretches the conventions of courtly love in the same manner as troubadour lyrics. She also brings up the connection of the female troubadours’ lyrics to the *chansons de femme*, or women’s songs, of Northern France. These women’s songs share many characteristics of the *trobairitz* lyrics; however, they tend to cover a broader range of topics, including the toils of daily life. These songs occur around the same time, and Jewers argues that the female troubadours would also have been influenced by such a popular tradition.

Marianne Shapiro continues this trend of scholarship in her article “The Provençal *Trobairitz* and the Limits of Courtly Love” and does not mention the sincerity (or lack of it) of the *trobairitz*, rather she examines how the *trobairitz* adopt and expand the tradition of the male troubadours through their writing. She notes that “the poetic content, forms, and the motifs of the system of *fin’amor* were clearly not wholly suitable or applicable to women lyricists. How

to utilize them and modify them was not only the challenge that confronted women lyricists but provides a test case to assess the flexibility of the system and its limits as well” (Shapiro 561). Shapiro examines the works of the female troubadours to identify how these authors take their unique situation as both composer and object to create a “basic shift that generates a number of other modifications within the available repertory of *topoi* in the system of *fin’amor*” (Shapiro 562). One area of commonality between the male troubadours and their female counterparts lies within the topic of self-justification. Shapiro writes, “Like the songs of other troubadours, the *cansos* of the *trobairitz* are preoccupied with self-justification; the praise of the beloved becomes a pretext for the defense of the song’s existence (563). Shapiro uses the poetry of Castelloza as her example, ultimately concluding that female troubadours justified themselves and their songs in the same manner as males; that is, “the unrequited or ill-rewarded lady—like her male counterpart—will endure and prevail because of her qualities of heart and mind” (564). Shapiro also points to the use of the *topos* that “equates the strength of love with the efficacy of the song” (564), but notices the shift that occurs between male and female authors when the constraints of society do not allow the female authors the same freedoms since their actions as troubadours are in direct conflict to norms of society. She notes that “the *trobairitz* demonstrate by omission their selection of those *topoi* that foreground the essential paradox of their femininity as poets within a male system” (565). Shapiro posits that female troubadours choose a small amount of topics out of the many in Provençal love poetry that specifically challenge and resist the notion of society and courtly love that prevent them from acting as a troubadour.

Laurel Amtower, in her article, “Private Desire and Public Identity in *Trobairitz* Poetry,” furthers the direction introduced by Shapiro and takes the stance that the *trobairitz* were, through

their poetry, challenging the restrictions that were imposed on women through the societal structures of courtly love, as exemplified by troubadour poetry. She writes that

trobairitz poetry, both recognizing the codified version of a public feminine persona and responding at the same time to these normative impulses, in some ways exposes the imprisoning effect the discourse ironically plays in its seeming elevation of female roles, even while exercising the ennobling effects and “superior being” that the status of “being in love” conferred (Amtower 5)

While it appears that the *trobairitz* are simply conforming to the social norms, in reality some of them are actually only using the paradigms to push back against the image of the silent, idealized women so prevalent in troubadour poetry.

Amtower also shares her view of the true worth of the *trobairitz* poetry when she writes that “what we can analyze in terms of the *trobairitz* canon, then, is less the actual voice or spoken desires of historical women, than the socio-cultural projection of a feminine voice that recognizes both the limitations of being an idealized loved object and the potential for assuming instead the active, desiring voice of the lover” (6). She sees the works of the female troubadours as being so influenced by their cultural surroundings as to make them less about the authors and more about the society in which they exist. The works of the *trobairitz* do not exist by themselves in a cultural vacuum; they are a product of their unique cultural setting and the gender paradigms created by the male troubadours.

Also, she sees the importance of love poetry as being that which grants higher standing in courtly standing. The value of a woman is greatly increased with love poetry being composed for her. Amtower writes that “the lady’s ‘valens’ is inextricably bound with notions of social and public presentation: she seeks validation through the lover, in other words, but it is not he who asserts her poetic identity, but the public who hears of her love” (8). The female

troubadours, then, are using the forms of courtly love poetry to increase their own social standing in the courts by openly proclaiming their love. She writes that “by circulating songs about desire and deferred love for public consumption, they trade a seeming inferiority and passivity for a form of cultural capital” (16). Amtower identifies further how it was possible for the *trobairitz* to operate within their social paradigm of the courtly lyric in order to advance themselves in the hierarchy of courtly society. They used the courtly lyric format to gain agency within the court and thus gain actual power, as opposed to the fictionalized authority represented in the male troubadours’ lyrics.

The idea of the *trobairitz* advancing in courtly society through courtly lyrics is also discussed by Eva Rosenn in the article “The Discourse of Power: The Lyrics of the *Trobairitz*.” Rosenn examines the use of lyric and songs by the *trobairitz* as a way of subtly criticizing the oppressive nature of their society. She claims that “there is, moreover, a contradiction of foundations in the contrast between the representation of women as powerful in the literary discourse of the male troubadours and the representation of women as powerless in the literary discourse of the female *trobairitz*, a discourse that in its very existence constitutes an act of empowerment” (Rosenn 1). The author explains the power structure of the time, discussing that while women did possess some power, due to the fact that bilateral inheritance was practiced for a short time, there was still

a fundamental contradiction in literary discourse where male authors code women as powerful and sexual in a culture where women's sexuality was feared, denigrated, and controlled. It is this profound contradiction that gives rise to a new discourse in which female authors depict their own powerlessness even as they are empowered through the discursive act itself” (Rosenn 2)

Rosenn makes the powerful argument that although the women troubadours were not able to completely overthrow the society that oppressed them through the writing of the songs, they were able to criticize it, by simply participating in the literary discourse.

The *trobairitz* were not simply content to comment on the tradition simply by entering into it; they also exposed themes by satirizing them for their own uses. Rosenn posits that "in reappropriating misogynistic language, the *trobairitz* also reclaim power over their own bodies, and celebrate this feat in a song about a young woman who herself has the power to choose her fate" (10). In this instance, the author is using the paradigm of objectification to assert herself and push back against the overwhelming social norms of the time that reduce her to the object of the male gaze. By taking ownership of the style of courtly lyrics, this author took back ownership of herself.

Nora Cottille-Foley expands upon the argument of the power in taking ownership of courtly lyrics in "The Structuring of Feminine Empowerment: Gender and Triangular Relationships in Marie de France," from *Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Barrier in Old French Literature*. While Cottille-Foley focuses on the works of Marie de France, her approach lends itself well to the struggles of the *trobairitz* to find autonomy and a source of power. Cottille-Foley writes that "women's writing can offer precisely the possibility of questioning and revising the structures in place. If discourse reproduces patterns of exploitation and repression, it also makes symbolic transgression possible" (153). While women were oppressed through being objectified and idealized in courtly lyrics during this time period, they were also able to use the same medium to invert the power structure and gain symbolic power through that inversion. Using the medium of the courtly lyric was a method for the

trobairitz to combat those same created personas and express their own sentiments about gender paradigms and interact with the personas created by the male troubadours.

Cottille-Foley demonstrates this through several examples of Marie de France's *lais*, and ultimately arrives at the conclusion that through the texts women are able to transform the power structure to one that repositions women as an acting agent in the story, and is no longer a simple object to be desired or traded by men. She writes that "in the *lais*, Marie de France nevertheless succeeds in undermining this type of imagery by transforming the lover-lady-patriarch triangle (the patriarchal figure being that of the king, father, or husband) so as to portray new configurations increasingly involving the female sphere of activity and creation as the story unfolds" (176). This transformation of the typical triangle into one that grants more power to the females within the story enables female authors to participate in the tradition of their male counterparts while at the same time allows them to alter the power structure to one that more favorably treats women.

To fully understand the work of the female troubadours in relationship to their male counterparts, it is necessary to understand the male troubadours as well. A chapter from *The Handbook of the Troubadour*, written by Amelia E. Van Vleck focuses on the literary analysis of the troubadour poetry. While on the surface this may seem like a strange tangent, it seems necessary to become familiar with troubadour scholarship in order to better understand how scholarship had been conducted differently between the groups as well as understand how to analyze the *trobairitz* in a similar manner. It is significant that there were numerous instances where Van Vleck condemned scholars for using types of analysis that are commonly found in *trobairitz* scholarship. One such instance is the use of the author's *vida*, or the story of their life,

as a way to find meanings in the poems. Van Vleck writes “even the most cautious scholars still occasionally make comparable mistakes. However small the grain of true-life experience underlying a fiction, curiosity will seek it out—and will likely cause more fiction to sprout from it” (23). It is strange that common practice in one sub-category of the troubadour tradition is exempted from a rather basic tenet on analysis of the greater part of the tradition.

Van Vleck also provides an example of literary criticism of a troubadour poem, so that the reader understands the basics. This is completely different from much of the criticism found in the *trobairitz* scholarship. Many *trobairitz* scholars focus on counting words and trying to ascertain sincerity of the author. However, Van Vleck dismisses the former as ineffective due to the particularly fluid nature of troubadour poetry. She posits that “subsequent interpretive efforts, no matter what critical method one follows, may rely heavily on minutiae of word choice and on broader movement observed in the sequence of words, of lines, of stanzas. Yet here one needs abundant tolerance of uncertainty” (Van Vleck 39). The very nature of the troubadour tradition nullifies the effectiveness of these techniques, to the point where an introductory handbook to the tradition advises against it. Yet, as seen in other previous articles, many scholars rely solely on word counting to find meaning. The author continues with the analysis, going through the poem and drawing meanings from the words and images, not from the life story of the author or from how many occurrences of *amor* the author used.

A practical example of how the female troubadours are treated differently than their male counterparts can be found in “The Reversed Order in the Poetry of Na Castelloza” from *The Voice of the Trobairitz*, where H. Jay Siskin and Julie A. Strome delve deep into the structure

and vocabulary of Castelloza to analyze the deep unhappiness that resonates throughout her poetry. They find that “within the poetic universe of Castelloza, the poles of positive and negative are reversed. The negativity of her poetic universe is all-encompassing, allowing no escape from its influence” (117). Also, they find that Castelloza’s negativity and self-effacing is reversed to the point where her suffering raises her social-standing (122). Finally, the authors conclude that “victim that she is, she is not victimized. She transforms her passive self into the active agent who creates a fundamentally negative universe” (125). This piece is extremely helpful in the analyses of the female troubadour in the tradition of the courtly love lyric. While the authors stop at the analysis of the suffering of Castelloza, their conclusions seem to strongly connect the topics and themes of Castelloza’s poetry with the *topoi* of the male troubadours. The badge of honor of the courtly lover is his suffering. He is expected, as the active agent, to agonize over his beloved. The authors have found that Castelloza is acting in the same manner: through her suffering, she acts as is proper of a courtly lover—agonizing and suffering because of her beloved. That she finds herself to be superior because of her suffering should come as no surprise then, because that is how honor and distinction is won in the world of courtly love. These authors present an analyzed example of how a *trobairitz* operates as a troubadour, using the same conventions and styles and achieves, in their mind, a similar result.

There has been much discussion of how to better examine the *trobairitz* in the discourse of troubadour scholarship. While some of it has blatantly reduced the works of the *trobairitz*, much of it has focused solely on the inclusion of the *trobairitz* into the corpus. In his article “When Women Aren’t Enough,” Allen J. Frantzen discusses the concept of gender theory as is

can be applied to studies of medieval texts. He writes that “gender is a more powerful analytical concept than sex. Gender can explain why some men are less powerful than others, why some women are more powerful than some men, and other imbalances that the physical equipment of sex does not account for” (Frantzen 144). Frantzen sees the study of medieval texts through the lens of gender theory as the next necessary step in truly including medieval women in academic discussion.

He terms the previous phrase of simply including women in the academic discussion “women in,” and claims its shortcomings appear when one closely examines the criticism produced under this view that simple inclusion is enough. To Frantzen, these works did not address the true issues that feminism was seeking to uncover. A prime example is one that Frantzen points out: “One might expect a book on ‘new readings’ to be about the ‘feminist readings’ that the editors refer to throughout the introduction, but the collection lacked a single theoretical discussion of the problem” (Frantzen 146). While it was easy to follow through with simply including women authors under the guise of new interpretations, to truly write and discuss the importance of the women in the past, and specifically the Middle Ages, a much different approach would need to be utilized.

The approach to utilize, to Frantzen’s mind, is that of gender theory and gender studies. For Frantzen, this is the best way to truly analyze the gender dynamics of medieval times in a way that lends new insights and ideas. He claims that “gender theory also redefines the positions of power in medieval texts and institutions These positions are clearest in those gender studies which focus on the phenomena of performance, choice, role-playing, gestures which complicate the binary division of the sexes and create multiple possibilities both for tracing the

play of signs within medieval cultures and for exploring those signs in our own interpretative responses” (Frantzen 149). Simply acknowledgment of the existence of female authors from the past is not good enough; rather it is necessary to engage in a discussion about how these texts play into and off of paradigms and social norms, both of the past and of today.

Gender Roles and Personae in Troubadour Lyric

When looking individually at the female troubadours and how they are working within the themes and gender roles, it is important to first describe and contextualize these norms and how they are different and similar to many of the norms common to present day society. At first glance, it may seem strange to see what seems to be a strong and powerful woman exerting control and influence over the man. In social paradigms in the contemporary Western world, the masculine gender norm is the powerful, aggressive and dominant voice. This is the opposite of what is found in the troubadour poetry that was written by male authors. In this poetry, the masculine role is one of supplication and submission, with the male troubadours constantly striving to please the object of their affection, their lady. They are behaving in a manner that places the control of the relationship into the hands of more powerful women, whom they have placed on a pedestal. An example of this can be seen in a verse of poetry by Guillaume de Poitiers, one of the first troubadours to be recorded. He writes that:

All joys are humbled, all must dance
To her law, and all lords obey
My lady, with her lovely way
Of greeting, her sweet pleasant glance,
A hundred years of life I'd grant
To him who has her love in play. (Mout jauzens me prenc en amar ll. 19-24)

This example of troubadour poetry indicates the proper role that the male troubadours were to perform within: be submissive to their lady and try to please her above all.

This created role, however, does not necessarily mean that the troubadour verses are to be taken as indicative of what conditions were like for women at the time. They are not to be viewed as evidence for powerful females that controlled land or money; in fact, the opposite was occurring. While the women of Occitan did for some time enjoy the ability to inherit land, leave it to descendants and have some semblance of control over their own lives, at this point they have been stripped of their rights and are in fact quite powerless over their own lives, much less commanding any sort of authority over a male lover. So why then does troubadour poetry place so much emphasis on the power of the idealized lady?

This question of the emphasis of power is discussed in “The Man Behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric.” It looks at the origin and purpose of the powerful lady within the *topoi* of troubadour poetry. It shows how the image of the lady was used as a reflection not of an actual female, but instead of an idealized persona (Burns 259). This persona is the combination of two starkly opposed but commonly encountered views of women: the dichotomy of the Virgin and the whore. On one side, troubadour poetry connects to the idea of the Virgin Mary, who is attractive because “she automatically grants all requests made by her devotees” (Burns 262). The appeal of this powerful and virginal character is due to her ability to help and provide for those who worship her. The lady of troubadour poetry, likewise, should follow this example and help and look after her lovers and supplicants (Burns 262). The second part of the dichotomy is the sexual aspect of the idealized woman. This woman is described as the ideal of physical

beauty and as a seductive temptress, but is just as fictional as the virginal and innocent lady at the other end of the spectrum. The corpus of troubadour poetry, then, works at reconciling these two opposing fictions into a third figure. It seeks to create a fictional female embodiment that is both innocent and sexual, who while being powerful and higher than the male troubadour, has but one purpose: to fulfill the needs and wishes of the male troubadour (Burns 268). The fictionalized female embodiment then, explains, in a way, the silence and lack of personality on the part of the female lover within male troubadour poetry: the lady as created by the male troubadour is non-existent and seemingly logically impossible. Her place on the pedestal only to serve as a way for the troubadour to have someone whose only purpose is to fulfill his wishes and desires. She does not need to speak, only grant each and every wish that her lover demands of her.

The created and fictionalized female role and persona, then, provides a frame of reference for the position of the *trobairitz* lyric within the wider corpus of the troubadour lyric. This is the main gender norm that the female troubadours were responding to, whether by adhering to this impossible idealized female that embodies two distinctly different and opposing personas that was created by male troubadours, or by acting outside of this norm and creating a female persona that does not adhere to the idealized female. One important commonality between these two manners in which the *trobairitz* respond to this norm is that in male troubadour poetry, the lady is silent, so the simple act of the *trobairitz* producing poetry in which the lady speaks would be in and of itself an occurrence that pushed boundaries. However, while there may be more ways

of dealing with the gender personas created by the male troubadours other than upholding those personas or rejecting them, my objective is to examine these two in particular.

Analysis of *Trobairitz* Lyrics

One *trobairitz*, Azalais de Porcairages, is an example of the female acting within the male paradigms and continuing the idea of the idealized woman that contained both an innocent as well as sexual nature. Women in the courtly love lyrics were in the position of silent authority: as they were nobility within the court, they were generally of a higher social status than the troubadour supplicating himself for her love, and they had no voice within the paradigm. For a woman to both speak by writing a poem as well as reverse the hierarchy by penning a love-sick poem would be seem unnatural to the audience, much the same way as women such as Joan Jett's presence in the very masculinized rock world was unnatural.

In the one surviving poem left from Azalais de Porcairages, she takes on masculine role of entreating the love of object of her desire, offering her services to him. She writes:

Bels amics, de bon talan
son ab vos toz jornz en gatge,
cortez' e de bel semblan,
sol no.m demandes outratge;
tost en venrem a l'assai,
qu'en vostra merce.m metrai:
vox m'avetz la fe plevida,
que no.m demandes faillida. (ll. 33-40, I)

(Handsome friend, I'll gladly stay
forever in your service—
such noble mien and such fine looks—
so long as you don't ask too much;
we'll soon come to the test,
for I'll put myself in your hands:

you swore me your fidelity
now don't ask me to transgress)

Azalais de Porcairages is playing the masculine role in this text, pledging her service to her lover, as long as he does not ask too much, of course. She uses submissive language, pledging herself to him and offering her service in exchange for his love; by simply switching the gendered pronouns, this could be a poem written by male troubadours.

Later in the poem, Azalais is seen embracing the same type of contradictory nature in her male lover that is often found in the female lovers of the male troubadours when she writes:

Amic ai de gran valor
que sobre toz seignoreia,
e non a cor trichador
vas me, que s'amor m'autreia (ll. 25-28, I)

(I have a friend of great repute
who towers about all other men,
and his heart toward me is not un-
true, for he offers me his love)

While it is not as blatant as in the lyrics composed by the male troubadours, Azalais de Porcairages here is placing her lover on a pedestal above other men and herself. By combining that with her earlier remarks on his physical affection, she is shown using the outlines of the formula the male troubadours created for describing the ideal lover. By continuing in the same thematic vein as the male troubadour, Azalais de Porcairages pushes the boundaries of the social and gender norms, as she is a woman writing in a masculine voice. She is applying the same idealized persona that is attached the female lover to a masculine subject, working with these norms in troubadour lyrics to produce a different take on the same ideas.

Another reaction to the social paradigms is the female troubadour acting within her appropriate gender role, as the powerful lady who is to be in control of the relationship and demands adoration by her lovers. The *trobairitz* that utilize this type of persona in their writing face a unique challenge: they must portray the idealized woman that was created by the troubadours. To respond to the social paradigm in this manner requires them to create a character that is completely contradictory in nature, by embodying through a poetic voice a woman that has both innocence as well as sexual prowess. In a similar manner, the highly sexualized nature of Madonna also portrayed this dynamic struggle of the combination of these two polar opposites.

An example of this reaction to the paradigm created by the male troubadours can be found in some of the poems scholars have written by Guillelma de Rosers. Like so many of the troubadours, and the *trobairitz* in particular, not much is known about her life, other than she was a courtly lady. Most of what can be known about her life can be deciphered from what is known about Lanfrances Cigla and the exchange of their shared *tenson* (177 Bogin). The *tenson* is a genre of poetry employed by the troubadours that is a conversation between two different persons, fictive or real. This particular *tenson* was written by Guillelma de Rosers and Lanfrances Cigla, a Genoese lawyer. In this lyric, the premise of the poem is that the male part is asking for a judgment from the female part, which conveys all authority and superiority throughout the poem. She writes:

Ancar vos dic que son malvatz usatge
degra laissar en aquel mezeis dia
li cavalliers, pos domna d'aut paratge

bella e pros dec aver en baillia (ll. 41-44, I)

(I'll tell you once again,
that man should change his attitude
that very day, and swear allegiance
to a lady noble, beautiful and rich)

This conversation has a completely different tone from the earlier poem. This woman is taking control of the situation and her lover. She is embodying the aspect of the female persona that has power and is able to grant the requests that her lover asks of her. She is acting as the superior in the relationship, which according to the hierarchy of the court and the persona created by the male troubadours, she would be.

Interestingly, in this particular *tenso*, the character of Lanfrancs is acting in a way that contradicts the normal gender roles for the male lover—an inversion that has not garnered much notice. He writes to Dame Guillelma “mas vencut voill que m'ajatz, com que sia (but, by any means available, I challenge you to conquer me)” (line 49). As the male lover in the relationship, this bold-faced assertion of authority falls completely out of line with the normal protocol for the male troubadour. Dame Guillelma, however, does not miss a beat, replying:

Lanfrancs, aitan vox autreie.us consen
que tan mi sent de cor e d'ardimen
qu'ab aital gein com domna si defen
mi defendri' al plus ardit que sia (ll. 53-56, I)

(Lanfrancs, I promise and I guarantee
that I'm so strong in feeling and tenacity
that with a women's subtlety
I'll ward off the most covetous design)

She quickly re-asserts her authority and power in the situation and does not seem to regard the lapse in correct behavior of Lanfranc as untoward. This slip in the carefully constructed vision of the lovesick and submissive male lover correlates with other similar slips in troubadour lyrics that show the true situation of women at the time. Burns turns to a lyric by Bernart de Ventadorn when he “tells his lady that if her husband beats her, she must not let him beat love from her heart” (258). While these slips are rare, it does show how the images of the adoring and submissive male lovers as well as strong and powerful female *domnas* are just that: images that were created and adhered to by the troubadours.

Criticism of Female Artists

The similarities between the situation of women in the genre of the courtly lyric and 1980's rock does not end at how they utilized these created female personas in writing their lyrics. In addition, the critical view of the females who did participate in that musical area at this time is very similar to how the *trobairitz* are still being viewed today. Instead of fully incorporating them into the corpus and examining how they are working with and through the paradigms of each different genre, they are instead pushed to the outskirts and only seen as an anomaly that is not worth the same attention or study. These women, just like the *trobairitz*, are made to justify their existence and importance within the paradigms before they are taken seriously, just as the *trobairitz*.

In a chapter on the history of how women in music have been presented, Brenda Johnson-Grau examines how the presence many women artists throughout the history of rock 'n roll have been minimized or outright ignored by rock media. While Johnson-Grau shows that women

have always been present throughout the history of rock 'n roll (203), she says that “in most histories of rock and pop, however, they get the short shrift. Rock critics and historians of pop music have a tendency to forget things that they dislike or that do not fit their peculiar version of rock 'n' roll authenticity” (203). Women have always been a part of the history of rock, just as the female troubadours have were a part of the troubadour tradition. Historians, however, have treated these two groups of women in the same way: by separating them into a distinctly Other group and treating them differently, when they acknowledge them at all.

Another similarity comes into play when the women groups are given attention by critics—instead of criticizing the music that the women are creating, the focus is placed on the women themselves. In a section of her book on the history of rock music and issues of gender within it, Johnson-Grau describes a passage written about the iconic group the Go-Go's. It focuses on the history of the group and history of their reception as a band, showing how differently the band was treated based on their gender, describing how it was marveled that girls could act in such a way. They were submitted to questions not about their music, but rather their gender. She writes “such a passage . . . adds some baggage to the trip up the rock ladder. In addition to being a band, the Go-Go's are expected to vindicate their gender. It is not about artistry. It is about what kind of woman the musician is” (211). Madonna and Jett share this with the trobaritiz. The art created by the women is not brought into question; rather, it is the type of women they are, from the perceived sluttish behavior of Madonna to the masculine image of Jett, extending to judgments of the character of the trobaritiz, including their romantic lives. Johnson-Grau sees this connection in modern female musicians, examining how “evaluating the

attractiveness of female musicians is another way that pop journalism deflects attention away from their artistry” (213) and “her home life is frequently the next topic for the profile of a female artist” (214). Female artists, regardless of time period, are defined by critics not by the quality of their work, but rather by their gender and the appropriate roles that they should be performing.

In her article about Madonna’s effect on the culture of America, Kaplan showcases how closely themes in both Madonna and some of the *trobairitz* align. Both take normal gender categories and expectations of the society and play into them by completely re-working them. Kaplan states “it rewrites such patriarchal narratives completely. The heroine of the video presides over the text before it begins, heralding it as dedicated to women” (157). During the height of her popularity in the 1980’s, Madonna consistently pushed boundaries and attempted to play with and expand gender norms.

This focus on the readjusting the gender norms has tremendous implications for the audience. Kaplan claims that “[Madonna] forces the spectator to question the boundaries of gender constructs and the cultural constraints on sexual themes and sexual fantasies” (157). Not only does Madonna take gender norms that are held as absolute and subverts them, but she forces the main-stream audience to take notice of them as well. Much of the criticism aimed at her comes not from her being sexual, but from the way in which she is sexual in the wrong way according to gender norms. Madonna works within the confines of traditional gender norms, pushing on them and expanding them through her work. While her overall image and aesthetic is ostensibly feminine, she takes on the masculine role created by her contemporary male artists,

which creates a tension between her image and behavior, which is part of her individual response to the persona of both devoted supplicant and silent and powerful *domna*, to use the phrase utilized by the male troubadours to describe their powerful and authoritarian lover.

Jett and other female musicians like her have been criticized for their performance as female musicians. Many see them as occupying a masculine space, especially due to the way they dress and the style of music they perform. This conflict between actions and lyrics mirrors that of Madonna. However, many critics see them as women simply imitating what men have already done. Since they are female, it has been suggested that “these women . . . have proved that it’s true: a woman can play the role of a rough rebel as convincingly as any man. But they’ve done so at the expense of bringing anything new, different, to the stock rock posture” (Reynolds 245). Reynolds does not see Jett and her contemporaries as contributing anything new to the music scene. They are simple imitators of what their male contemporaries have already done. However, Reynolds fails to take into consideration the importance of the act that Jett and others are doing. By taking on the fictionalized female persona, they are expanding the genre and giving a voice to the silent women high on a pedestal. Jett’s ability to perform and act in such a way is her working outside of what society expects from her gender and expressing herself through a persona that is so contradictory in nature.

Gender Norms and Personas in the Present Day

The manner in which the female troubadours reacted to the paradigms of the troubadour lyrics by both upholding them by acting as the strong and powerful *domna* as well as reversing the roles by acting as the submissive and adoring lover connects these women in a strange way to

a similar situation in the twentieth century. While it seems a strange and dubious connection, the heavily male dominated troubadour corpus compares well with the music industry of the 1980's. The rock bands of the 1980's were almost exclusively male; very few if any females were taken seriously in that role.

The social norms and paradigms that were created by these bands and other musical artists created an extremely similar female persona. The women being addressed by these male artists were shown to be strong and powerful, physically beautiful, innocent and highly sexual all at the same time. This idealized woman that was created was silent and placed high above the listener and artists above them socially. These women were shown to have the power in the relationship, seemingly able to control the man and were able to grant his requests. He, in turn, pledged his undying love and affection in order to be seen as worthy to be selected as her lover. Telling lyrics from Def Leppard's "Pour Some Sugar On Me" describe this ideal woman:

Lookin' like a tramp, like a video vamp
Demolition woman, can I be your man?
. . . .
Sometime, anytime, sugar me sweet
Little miss ah innocent sugar me, yeah (Def Leppard)

This dichotomy of the innocent yet sexual woman is still present, even hundreds of years later. The male artists that are producing music continue in the same vein as the male troubadours by creating a persona of an idealized woman.

These music artists even place women on the same type of pedestal, granting them a sort of power. In a song by Poison, the artist sings:

She'll slide you in you taste the sin
she slowly gets inside your head
you feel her take control and she'll steal your soul
she's the devil lying in your bed
she's the lord of your things and it's no surprise ("Devil Woman")

The artist is granting a woman complete power over him, putting himself at her mercy.

However, just as with the male troubadours, it is simply so the woman can be a vessel through which the male artist receives whatever he desires. As the woman is silent throughout these songs, she has no personality other than what is ascribed to her by the male artists; and as such, she is used to provide for the male artist whatever he desires. These supposedly adored and powerful women are little more than magic genies for these artists: if they rub the magic lamp in the right manner, they will get their wish. This fact is succinctly and pointedly shown in another

Poison song. The artist sings:

I want action tonight
satisfaction all night
You've got the love I need tonight ("I Want Action" Poison)

For this artist, he wants something and his conveniently created idealized and powerful female is the perfect person to grant his wishes. He needs not worry about the wants or desires of the woman: she is silent throughout, created expressively to cater to his demands.

This interesting connection between the male troubadours and the male rock bands of the 1980's extends also to their female counterparts. How each set of female artists, whether troubadour or singer, deals with the fictionalized persona of the ideal woman is also surprisingly similar, given the vast period of time that separates them. They both respond to the paradigms of

the time in a specific manner: by taking on a male persona or by working within the fictive persona created by the male artists of the time. Two female artists that do manage to rise through the male-saturated music industry at this time provide excellent examples of either method of reaction. These two artists, Joan Jett and Madonna, showcase how this reaction looks in the twentieth century, as opposed to the works of the troubadours in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Analysis of Joan Jett's Persona

Joan Jett provides an example of how female artists responded to the female persona created by male artists by taking on that fictionalized identity and acting as the strongly sexual and powerful woman that had been sung about by so many different male artists. While looking solely at her appearance, it may seem as though she would be the one who would take on the masculine identity: she dresses similarly to many of her male contemporaries, and her musical style was much more in line with much of what other male artists were doing at the time. However, when analyzing her lyrics it is plain to see that Jett took on the persona of the powerful *domna*, so to speak, of rock music. She is powerful and aggressive, demanding and sexualized, while at the same time maintaining a bit of the innocence so highly prized by many male rock bands. It is clear that Jett's "take no prisoners" approach to love and relationships in her lyrics is exactly what is described by other male rock bands.

To take on the persona of the idealized woman from the songs and lyrics of 1980's male bands, Jett needs to be the blend of innocence and power that creates a seemingly impossible combination. She demonstrates her innocence in songs like "Hold Me," where she sings:

No fuss or fight tonight
Be gentle as you can
Everyone thinks I'm much stronger
Much stronger than I am

Honey, I get scared and lonely
And I need someone to hold me
I get scared and lonely,
And I need someone to hold me
Just like you do (Joan Jett and the Blackhearts)

Obviously this is not quite the same blushing virgin innocence that was crucial to the feminine persona created by the male troubadours; but for the time period this can be seen as revealing the innocent side of Jett. This is crucial too, in the fictionalized persona, because as Burns points out, “the problem with the erotic woman is that she can sleep with other men” (268). The innocence that is always brought into the picture is essential in guaranteeing that the woman will only be available to the male subject.

Jett more fully showcased her powerful, strong, aggressive, and sexual side through her lyrics. These can be seen in a multitude of songs, each showing a different aspect of this persona. Her highly sexual side comes out through “Do You Wanna Touch Me”, when she sings:

Talking's fine
If you got the time
But I ain't got the time to spare

Do you wanna touch? (Yeah) (Jett)

Jett is not lacking in the erotic side to the persona that she chose to respond with, nor does she lack in taking control in the relationship and placing herself in a position of authority, with the power and ability over her partner. In what is probably her most famous song, “I Love Rock'n'Roll,” Jett shows how she takes control over the relationship, singing:

I saw him dancin' there by the record machine
I knew he must a been about seventeen
The beat was goin' strong

Playin' my favorite song
An' I could tell it wouldn't be long
Till he was with me, yeah me, singin' (Joan Jett and the Blackhearts)

Here, in this lyric, not only does Jett initiate the relationship, but it is very clear who belongs to who. She is very specific that she has the power in the relationship by detailing that he is with her. He is absorbed into her, rather than then the normal male/female relationship where the female identity is absorbed into the male (ie-women traditionally taking a the men's name after marriage). Jett's immediate power over the male object of her desire is extremely telling in identifying her as taking on the female persona created by male artists.

Analysis of Madonna's Persona

Madonna, in turn, is another of the few female artists that were able to rise above the male-dominated musical industry that represents another viable response to the fictionalized female persona. She, however, takes the opposite method of Jett. She represents a response that takes the masculine role, of the supplicating lover who gives control in the relationship and creates an idealized persona in which she sings about. Now, due to the extremely variable nature of the scope of Madonna's career, she has at times played into this gender dynamic differently, if she has at all. However, the fact remains that it can be very clearly seen that throughout her career she has taken on a similar persona as the male artists in the 1980's and creates an idealized and fictional persona that bears little resemblance to a real person.

Many of Madonna's lyrics show a similar theme to that of both the male troubadours and male rock bands. She talks about the object of her songs using the same language of desire and

love that the troubadours do, and through her lyrics positions herself below the male object. In one of her songs, she sings:

Don't put me off 'cause I'm on fire
And I can't quench my desire
Don't you know that I'm burning up for your love
You're not convinced that that is enough ("Burnin Up" Madonna)

Here Madonna is pleading for the attention of a lover, similar to how the troubadours vied for the affections of their ladies. She places her object above her on a pedestal, granting him power and authority over her by giving him control over some aspect of her happiness.

Madonna also places a focus on the objectification of the men in her songs, transforming them into a idealization of the perfect specimen. While she is not as poetic as the male troubadours, the connection still exists. In her song, "He's A Man," she describes her lovers, singing "Square jaw, ooo, such a handsome face" (Madonna) and in "Like a Virgin" she sings "You're so fine and you're mine" (Madonna). Emphasis is placed on the physical nature as well as the characteristics that define the objects of her songs as powerful and authoritarian.

Finally, Madonna also follows the troubadour's formula in that she places a lot of importance on her lover's ability as a silent wish-granter, a vessel through which what she wants is granted. Throughout her songs the love objects in them are placed above her on a pedestal. In a similar fashion to the troubadours and the male rock artists, she identifies the ability of her love object to provide her with what she wants, from material things to a better social status. She sings in "Express Yourself" that

What you need is a big strong hand
To lift you to your higher ground
Make you feel like a queen on a throne (Madonna)

She identifies the ability to help lift her out of her current situation to a more desirable one as paramount to a relationship, and advises others to evaluate their relationships based on how well that is being accomplished for them. In “Dear Jessie,” she is very blatant in showcasing the desire for someone to mindlessly grant her wishes, singing:

Make a special wish that will always last
Rub this magic lantern
He will make your dreams come true for you (Madonna)

Using the imagery of the magic lantern, she compares a lover to a genie, whose only purpose is to grant wishes for the owner of the magic lamp. Finally, in “Material Girl”, she shows that money, and by default, status, is what matters to her:

They can beg and they can plead
But they can't see the light, that's right
'Cause the boy with the cold hard cash
Is always Mister Right (Madonna)

She shows that it is the ability of her lover to provide for her and better her position in life that is truly important. While Madonna is much more direct in this aspect than the male troubadours or even the male rock artists, all three have this desire to use the fictionalized lover persona as a way to have their desire for increased standing granted. Any power and authority they grant to their lover when they supposedly place them on a pedestal is ultimately only to advance their own interests.

Madonna also questions gender norms through the combination of different dress and actions. Deidre Pribram asserts that “combining gender roles and dress *is* Madonna’s game of defiance. Her skills a part pop icon and part performance artist are tied to her ability to play on the body’s appearances and turn gender roles and dress in on themselves. . . . Does her mix-and-

match outfit of male business suit and female corset comment on what it means to be male—or female? Or does it address what it might mean to exist in a society not delineated on the basis of gender?” (199). While at the outset, Madonna’s boundary pushing outfits and music may seem to simply be a highly sexualized grab at attention—but in fact, she is no more sexualized than many other pop acts. The true problem with Madonna’s dress and music comes from her use of traditional gender roles in a way that subverts them from within. She plays into the roles, but also pushes and expands them as a way of self-expression.

One scholar on Madonna, Sheila Whitley, also addresses the issue of Madonna’s shock tactics. She agrees that “a rejection of the discourse of irony would suggest that Madonna’s portrayal of femaleness and femininity . . . only confirms a masculine definition of femininity. Clearly her image fits the pop orthodoxy of ‘sexy women’, and as such, there is the distinct possibility that an audience will simply find her titillating” (137). Madonna’s overall aesthetic is highly sexualized: she is often portrayed in a way that seems to play directly into the male gaze as many of her songs deal with sex and she is often wearing erotic clothing. However, “the ‘arty, self-conscious, issue-oriented’ statements of her later videos are ingeniously confrontational, emanating from the mind of a woman who is fully aware of the politics of gender” (Whitley 137). While Madonna may seem to portray this overly sexualized pop star, the topics and manner in which she acts directly challenge this popular gender norm in a way that expands her actions farther than simply pushing her sexuality. Madonna’s use of gender norms actively changes them, which is the real cause of concern for her opponents.

Conclusions

Due to how incredibly broad the topic of the gender roles within the troubadour lyrics, it was impossible during the course of my study to completely analyze all aspects that affected the complexities of the created personas and how the *trobairitz* interacted with them. There are several areas within this topic that warrant further study, such as the possibility of sarcasm within their writings. These also expands to the situation of the female artists in the 1980's, as there are many other factors that influence how they choose to respond to the gender roles created by male artists. Unfortunately, the largeness of the project rendered it impossible to address all these areas, but by necessity are left to be the topic of further study.

Throughout scholarship, the *trobairitz* have either been marginalized or exalted due to their gender. They have been lumped together as one group, without much attention paid to both the context that they existed in as well as how they may have acted within that context as individuals, rather than as a group. Through this paper, attention has been brought to how these female troubadours responded to the paradigms and gender roles and personas created by their male counterparts. These paradigms created a feminine persona, not necessarily an accurate representation of real women, prompting a response of female writers to work within the same paradigms to create their own interpretations of that persona. To discuss different female troubadours as individuals, rather than treating them all as one group, has shown how they truly participated and contributed to the body of troubadour work, having added a different dimension and perspective to the canon. This interaction of the female troubadours with the gender roles created by male troubadours is mirrored in the situation of the female musicians in the 1980's, connecting these two groups of women from vastly different time periods together. Female artists such as Madonna and Joan Jett responded to the female persona created by male rock

bands such as Poison and Def Leppard. These female artists either rejected these gender roles through their lyrics by acting in a masculine role or accepted them by acting in the feminine persona. Either way, they made a serious contribution to the body of work and attention should be paid to them. For both groups of women, however, their gender proved to be an impediment to their work being taken seriously. They were both scrutinized on their gender, rather than their abilities, and without consideration of how they worked within the paradigms created before them.

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